

## **Around Town with the Town Manager And the Director of Public Works #9**

We recently noted on Front Porch Forum that a resident had inquired about how to get speed bumps installed on a Colchester street. As this is becoming a more frequently asked question within the community, we would like to direct this weeks article to this topic. The question also has a broader context – which is, responsible driving is driving safely.

Bryan will provide the process the Town uses through its Department of Public Works and the Traffic Committee to investigate and determine the best means to slow vehicles on streets in community neighborhoods. Additionally, we will discuss options the Colchester Police Department has available for neighborhoods affected by speeders.

To answer the question originally posed on Front Page Forum, speed bumps are one of many strategies designed to reduce the speed of motor vehicles. Traffic Engineers refer to this practice as “Traffic Calming”. Traffic calming can generally be defined as the use of education, enforcement and/or engineering to reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for non-motorized street users.

In 2002, the Town developed a Traffic Calming Manual and Policy Guidelines which were adopted by the Select Board. These documents allow the Town to effectively respond to requests for traffic calming through a systematic and analytical approach administered equitably throughout the community. This comprehensive approach is necessary to balance the community’s needs for mobility, public safety and quality of life.

All Town owned streets are eligible for some level of traffic calming. A request for traffic calming on a residential street must originate from a Colchester resident who resides on that street. A request for traffic calming on an arterial street can be submitted by any Colchester resident. All requests must be submitted in writing to the Town’s Traffic Committee, which consists of the Chief of Police, the Director of Public Works, and the Town Engineer.

After receiving a request, a detailed evaluation is performed that includes the collection of data such as vehicle speeds, traffic volumes, development density, presence and location of pedestrian facilities, location of nearby pedestrian generators, and accident history to name a few. The evaluation of this data is then used to determine whether specific traffic calming warrants are met. In order for a street to receive further consideration for traffic calming, at least one of the warrants needs to be met.

The traffic calming warrants are centered upon both vehicle speeds and volumes. The speed warrant states that the measured 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed must be at least 10 miles per hour over the posted speed limit. The 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed is the speed that is not exceeded by 85% of the drivers on that street. The volume warrant requires that the cut through traffic on a street exceeds 25% of the total vehicle volume. Cut through traffic is the diversion of traffic from a congested street to a less congested alternate route.

Assuming that at least one of the traffic calming warrants has been met, the request will then be prioritized against other streets where warrants have also been met. This involves comparing the technical data collected earlier in the process and using a numerical scoring system to determine the streets with the greatest need. Because the development and implementation of traffic calming measures involves extensive public input and involvement, and therefore becomes quite time consuming, the Town can only manage a limited number of projects at one time which requires this prioritization process.

Upon selection and advancement of a specific street into the public input and involvement process, a toolbox of traffic calming measures shall be used to identify possible traffic calming measures. The toolbox contains 33 different traffic calming measures, which are organized within five different levels. Level one measures typically represent the least expensive and aggressive measures. These include such strategies as educational efforts or increased enforcement. Level five measures typically represent the most expensive and aggressive measures. These include such strategies as physical alterations to the street such as changes to the streets geometry of raised and/or fixed barriers. The strategy of speed bumps falls into this category.

The Traffic Committee then works with the public to develop a traffic calming strategy for the street. All traffic calming strategies must begin by using level one measures. Level one and two measures may be approved by the Traffic Committee. Level three through five measures must be approved by the Select Board. Level four and five measures must also be supported by all emergency service agencies.

Prior to advancement of the measures, the Town must receive a petition with more than 50% of the residents from a residential street acknowledging their support for the recommended traffic calming measure. For arterial streets, support must be demonstrated by the majority of the Colchester residents in attendance at the public meeting.

Following the implementation of any measure, a six month follow-up evaluation is conducted to determine the effectiveness of the measure. A measure will be considered effective if none of the warrants are met. In the event that any of the warrants continue to be met, the process will continue with the development of a revised plan utilizing strategies from the next highest level. This process would continue until the problem is corrected, or the limits of the plan are met.

To many, I am sure this may seem like an unnecessarily difficult process to go through to address concerns with vehicle speeds on our roadways. Understand however, that in addition to addressing the citizens concerns regarding traffic, we must also be able to quantify the type and degree of the traffic problems and make efficient use of Town resources by providing a way of prioritizing traffic calming projects and measuring their effectiveness. We must also encourage citizen participation in the process of selecting and implementing traffic calming measures, and address the dual and conflicting interests of traffic calming and emergency vehicle response.

As noted in the beginning of this column, the Police Department also has options to assist community neighborhoods deal with speeding cars. The first is driver education – that is letting people know how fast they are driving. This is accomplished by the use of the “radar box” which flashes the speed of an approaching vehicle. Simultaneously, the box

lets the driver know the posted speed limit for that street. Given today's automobiles, our sensory perception does not always correlate with the speed we think we are driving and the actual speed of the vehicle. Lastly and the least desired option by the public is having the police use their radar and laser equipment for the purpose of ticketing speeders. Ticketing is a means to provide awareness for driver and pedestrian safety. A citation is always cheaper than an accident. To have the radar box stationed on your street, please call Chief Kirker at 264-5555.

What we have outlined here is an overview of avenues to use Town resources to promote safe driving and community safety. If you have any specific questions regarding these processes, please feel free to contact our Public works director, Bryan Osborne, at 265-5625, or by e-mail at [bosborne@colchestervt.gov](mailto:bosborne@colchestervt.gov). or Chief Kirker of the Police Department.

Cordially,  
**Al Voegele &  
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